

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF APRIL 20, 2015**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the April 20, 2015 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Frank Szeps, Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent) and Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor). Also present: Town Manager Guy Scaife, Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Services) and Various Seniors of R.H.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Vargas asked if anyone from the public wished to speak. Bernadette Pietraroia, 10 Waters Avenue, R.H., said she wasn't sure what direction they are going in but she knew from this Committee's last meeting that the seniors were being asked about what types of things they would like to have. She would like there to be more things for men (i.e. pool tables). She also thinks the teens need more things too and thinks it would be wonderful if the little children had more space so that the gym could be freed up more often if they want to have entertainers in.

Chuck Robison, 54 Pratt Street, R.H., noticed that the seniors couldn't walk in the gym the other day because Rocky Hill High School was using it due to things going on in terms of a prom. It seems to him that seniors shouldn't be put at the bottom of the list in that area because other gyms could be opened. He doesn't think the seniors should be the first ones to lose their place and he thinks this reflects a feeling that seniors are not as important. He thinks there should be consideration for the seniors, who are a very fast growing segment of Rocky Hill's population, because they have paid their share with education and done their bit.

Barbara Robison, 54 Pratt Street, R.H., said they don't have enough space right now to have other activities. She was recently at the Glastonbury Senior Center and they have an arts and crafts room, two regulation pool tables and a café, etc., there. She thinks a lot of seniors need social interaction. They also need activities for active seniors. She would like to see more space for seniors, as well as for the whole community.

Bernadette Pietraroia said thank you because she understands that a bocce court is going to be erected and that there might possibly be a walking trail around the whole campus with benches. It would be fun for them to have a picnic outside for example so that they aren't always inside.

Chairwoman Vargas asked Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Services) to give an update as to what the Staff has done since this Committee's last meeting in February. Lisa Zerio said she has been working with Denise Sanderson, Cathy Sylvester and Brittany Sanderson (Parks and Recreation). The short term accomplishments that they have already done or that are in the works are: (1.) Letters have been ordered that will say "And Senior Center" for the Old Main Street side of the building where it states "Rocky Hill Community Center" and they are looking into getting signage for the front of the building on the library side that will state "Rocky Hill Community Center and Senior Center"; (2.) There had been a lot of input about the *Pivotal Press* that they have as not being useful so Brittany Sanderson revised it and it is excellent; (3.) A 50" screen TV has been purchased for the Wii bowling program and Denise Sanderson has ordered a console with the Facilities Department so that this can be put in Room # 2; (4.) They had received a lot of input from the surveys about how people didn't know that there is a Senior Center. Lisa Zerio said she went to Town Manager Scaife. There will be an insert in the tax bills that will have Parks and Recreation news and she wants to devote half of a page for senior news. Lisa Zerio said she will be working with the Senior Task Force, Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson as to what they want to see in this; (5.) They are moving forward on the walking trail and Lisa Zerio said she is working with Ed Chiucarello on this. There will be four or five benches throughout the mile walk; (6.) They have been having meetings with the Senior Staff, Mary Hogan (Library Director) and the IT Department about the revamping of their computer programs. She thanked the seniors for their patience; and (7.) They are looking for a monitor for the foyer that will have scrolling news. Lisa Zerio said she is holding back on this for a little bit to see how the budget goes.

Lisa Zerio addressed the issue that had been brought up this evening about the Senior Walk Track issue last week. During school vacation, there is a Camps Rock program and Stevens School was booked for that. She received a phone call on Monday afternoon around 3:00 p.m. about how unforeseen construction had to be done there so the children had to be moved out of there first thing on Tuesday morning. She had to put the children somewhere so they had to use the gym at the Community Center. Emergencies happen once in a while and this is probably about ten times per year. She apologized for the inconvenience but she said it is a Community Center and they have to try to make everything fit.

Councilor Vargas referred to the men's activities and she asked if any research has been done as far as calling the Billiard Place in R.H. and seeing if there are other things they can do with businesses in Town. Lisa Zerio said this is on the list. She said Cathy Sylvester had called the Sheraton to see if they could use the pool there and they said no. Lisa Zerio said maybe that is a phone call they can make to see if they can address that. Councilor Vargas wants to make sure that this doesn't get lost because maybe they can offer other activities for men and women if there are businesses in Town they can use if they don't have a physical facility right away. Lisa Zerio said they are hoping that maybe some of the local gyms will give a senior discount.

Chairwoman Vargas asked Melodie Perretto if she wanted to speak now. Melodie Perretto, 148 Raymond Road, R.H., passed out a handout to the Committee. (Please see the First Attachment.) Two hundred and two surveys had gone out. Seven people didn't want to answer this survey for personal reasons. She went over follow-up information on the presentation that had been given by Town Manager Scaife. Chairwoman Vargas told Melodie Perretto that she got her short term

goals but she got lost in her medium and long term ones. Town Manager Scaife asked Melodie Perretto for a written copy of what she had said so that there wouldn't be any confusion. (Please see the Second Attachment.) Melodie Perretto said the seniors don't have the ability to be like a consultant or Architect. Councilor Kochanek told Melodie Perretto that those are all valid points she mentioned but he got lost. Councilor Kochanek asked Melodie Perretto to give a couple of examples of what she is talking about when she is talking about cost options. Melodie Perretto questioned if they should get a consultant to come in to look at what they have and what would be feasible or if they should they have a Town Engineer look at this as to what can feasibly be done. Chairwoman Vargas asked if this would be what would be done to the building or what it would be done to. Melodie Perretto said this would be what would be done to their facility. They could maybe put a wing on their Community Center so that they could get away with it for five or ten years. She asked why the land in the back of the Kennedy House can't be turned into a parking lot. Councilor Kochanek said only so much asphalt can be put down to cover the grass. He confirmed that for the options, they are talking about fixing this facility or doing something else and Melodie Perretto said yes.

Councilor Kochanek referred to the survey and how one hundred and eighteen people want to stay in this facility and seventy-six people want to go someplace else. He asked Melodie Perretto how strongly she thinks the one hundred and eighteen people feel. Melodie Perretto thinks that would be a good 90% but she said there is a problem with regards to parking. Councilor Kochanek said to get this clear that a little over 50% of the people want to stay here and a little less than 50% would be willing to go someplace else. Parking is an issue and there is a lot of activity here. They are also talking about more activities and those would require space. There is also the space constraint between the amount of physical space that is around and scheduling the space. The idea about having a café is excellent but they can't do it in this facility because there is no space. He knows that Town Manager Scaife is looking for space but he doesn't think that he will find it unless he is a magician. Councilor Kochanek said the Kennedy House might be an option depending on what the laws allow them to do with that much space. He doubts that the Town will buy more land because there isn't that much left that would be convenient for everyone. Melodie Perretto referred to Moser School and asked about taking that building down. Councilor Kochanek said nothing is wrong with that building. His opinion is that that building is very sound. There is room in the back of it for parking. It has large classrooms and a cafeteria. He told them to talk about renovating that building. He mentioned that Wethersfield's Bd of Ed is in the renovated school where Wethersfield's Town Green is and they did the exact same thing he is talking about right now. There is nothing they can't do if they want to. He told Melodie Perretto in answer to her questions that he has no solution to the problem. Melodie Perretto thinks that part of the solution will be whenever whoever will be writing grants for them will apply for those because they will be told they will be given a grant but the building will have to be called a certain name. She mentioned that a lot of the closed schools are being turned into Community Centers. She is seeing a lot of land at Moser School so there is plenty of parking. Councilor Kochanek said it would cost a couple of million dollars to renovate that. A new building would cost one million plus dollars but they would also have to acquire land and everything else that would go with it. He thinks that people who say this can't be done should look at Towns that are around them to see what they have done with old schools. He also thinks the seniors' needs will be filled with Moser School. He told Melodie Peodie if his opinion is bought into this that they have to convince other people to do it too and he told her

they have to weigh their options as to what they can do. Councilor Kochanek said by the seniors telling him that they want to stay or they want to go, etc., isn't telling anybody what they want as a group. Melodie Perretto said maybe they should open this to discussion to see what people feel about it and Councilor Kochanek agreed. Melodie Perretto said a discussion can be brought forth to this Committee, the Town Council and hopefully there will be a referendum. She asked if twenty year old and thirty year olds, etc. are going to vote for this because a certain age group had been solicited to fill the survey out. Councilor Kochanek thinks that people have a recognition about how people who have reached the age of a senior will have wants and needs just like everybody else in Rocky Hill. People will also recognize that they can't keep putting things off that should have been taken "head-on" to begin with.

Chairwoman Vargas said they have to check with Town Manager Scaife to see if Moser School could be an option. Chairwoman Vargas said from past meetings though that they have heard that the seniors want to be around the children but they won't have the interaction with the children if Moser School is going to become a Senior Center. She referred to the Minutes that she reread from the last meeting of this Committee and she said this Committee was asking the Senior Task Force to come to them to say that they want a Senior Center or that they want to be in the present facility so that they can have the children, which they are finding out probably won't happen though. The Staff has done seven things on a short term basis that weren't there six to eight months ago. They are listening and she thinks Town Manager Scaife has done a great job in analyzing the space. Chairwoman Vargas doesn't want them to be frustrated but this Committee needs to know if the seniors want to be by themselves and if they want their own Senior Center before they can go to the Town Council. If so, it will then be this Committee's job to go to the Town Council to advocate for them. They will need to explain this to the younger voters too. She asked the seniors how she can help them though if they aren't sure that they want to be by themselves and not be with the children. She referred to what Councilor Kochanek had said about them "spinning our wheels" and she doesn't want to waste people's time. Chairwoman Vargas told the seniors that they should be having these discussions during the day at the Community Center.

Cathy Sylvester referred to the position that Melodie Perretto had spoken about and she said that is her position. Cathy Sylvester said she had come in as a Senior Coordinator twenty-seven years ago and she took over the children's programming five or six years after that. The Staff in Glastonbury and not the seniors had called Rocky Hill when they were redoing the Community Center/Senior Center there. She thinks the seniors need to give them information but asked if in the end, it isn't the Staff that is paid to make the decisions. She then said it is different as far as the children sharing with the seniors as opposed to them taking the room away. She thinks a Community Center would put young people in there and that makes more sense as a taxpayer. Chairwoman Vargas asked Cathy Sylvester about Moser School. Cathy Sylvester said she is paid to do her job and she mentioned about if Town Manager Scaife, the Town Council and Lisa Zerio think that Moser School is a good idea. Cathy Sylvester thinks that is a viable spot but they don't want to "break the bank" because they only have so much money. Chairwoman Vargas said that was the point she was trying to get at. Councilor Kochanek said they need to know what they want to accomplish exactly. The seniors have to understand that there are certain things they can't accomplish in this facility. He told them that they either switch to another location that offers them all of the things, etc., or they have to narrow the amount of

things they are looking for based on what is available. He thinks the Committee wants to know what direction they want them to go in. Cathy Sylvester asked Councilor Kochanek if he was asking the Staff or seniors and he said he would like to know what both of them want. Cathy Sylvester suggested a new place if they can't get everything here. She also mentioned that preschool is becoming more of a need. Chairwoman Vargas said the children can take over all the space in the present facility if the seniors move to Moser School but the children and seniors seem to like having each other around. Cathy Sylvester said the present facility would still be used because they also have Teen Center and basketball, etc. Chairwoman Vargas said this is what she is saying. Councilor Kochanek asked Cathy Sylvester if this is what she would envision or if she disagrees with this. Cathy Sylvester said as a taxpayer that she would say a Community Center. Chairwoman Vargas asked what they would do with the present facility if everything is taken out of it. Cathy Sylvester said there would be other programs running in it and they are always looking for meeting spaces. Councilor Kochanek asked Cathy Sylvester if she envisions accomplishing everything that is wanted and needed by the seniors if they remained in their present facility or he asked her if she would envision that it would be a better choice to put this at another location. Cathy Sylvester said they can't accomplish everything in the present location and they would also have to ask Lisa Zerio what she thinks.

Bernadette Pietraroia said she would like to stay at the present location because she has gotten used to it and the unknown as to where this might be is scarier compared to what is already known. She is more for a Community Center because she feels they will be more likely to get funding and grants that would serve multiple generations compared to what they would get for a Senior Center. She doesn't think though that many seniors would be opposed to going to Moser School if they can't get funding for a Community Center to keep the integration. She mentioned that the seniors had done a Wii Bowling Tournament last Friday with Bloomfield. A converted school is being used in Bloomfield for the seniors and it has everything so she thinks the Rocky Hill seniors would be happy in that environment. She also thinks it would be wonderful if the seniors could look at Moser School so that they could encourage everyone to support it. Councilor Kochanek said the seniors don't want to go there now because it is being used for storage. He referred to them envisioning Moser School and then how the senior population will get bigger so they can put an addition on it because there is a lot of land there. Everything that they have been talking about with regards to staying at the present facility won't "wash" if they get the future senior growth they believe will happen. Bernadette Pietraroia said the parking lot that is across the street now from the Community Center isn't enough and part of this problem is the people who are coming in to drop off or pick up the children, even if they are only there for a moment. She thinks they ideally would all love a Community Center and the integration because they would get better tax support for that. It makes more sense though dollar wise for the seniors to go to Moser School and she doesn't think the seniors would object to that. The older seniors who come to the present facility for lunch, etc. would probably just want to stay here but she said they will get used to it also because things change.

Rich Laria, 202 The Arbors, R.H., agrees that they have been "spinning their wheels" for quite some time now. He questioned how this evolved and he said this started out as the members of the Senior Affairs Committee plus four representatives from the Senior Task Force. They used to meet in a conference room. Chairwoman Vargas said that she, Councilor Kochanek and Councilor Szeps have always been the members of the Senior Affairs Committee and everyone

else had just attended their meetings. Rich Laria said this Committee had met in a conference room and he didn't know how it evolved to be like it is now. Councilor Kochanek said they wanted to get more input. Rich Laria thinks Cathy Sylvester was trying to say to let the Senior Task Force do their job with regards to gathering the information from the seniors and then they could come to this Committee as a small group. Councilor Kochanek told Rich Laria that the group of seniors should still be present so they could hear what he is telling this Committee. Councilor Kochanek said the Committee is asking for a direction to be given to them. Chairwoman Vargas said this is what they had asked for at this Committee's meeting in February. They had given a couple of months for the Senior Task Force to meet with the senior groups and she said that she doesn't mind giving them a few more months. Rich Laria asked this Committee if they want direction to be given to them at a meeting. Chairwoman Vargas said yes. Councilor Kochanek told Rich Laria to find out where the seniors want to go and then to come back to tell this Committee. Councilor Kochanek said they have identified a couple of things they can't do and they have identified a couple of things that Town Manager Scaife can do for them, which he has done. Councilor Kochanek thinks they have benefitted by having everyone here to listen to everybody else. Rich Laria said Moser School had been spoken about one year ago. Councilor Kochanek said this Committee has to be told if the seniors want that or if they want something else so that this Committee will go after it if it makes sense. Rich Laria asked if the seniors can count on this Committee once they give something definitive. Councilor Kochanek said yes. Chairwoman Vargas said they have had a new Town Manager since this Committee was created and Town Manager Scaife has done his due diligence in working with the Parks and Recreation Department and doing the space analysis. Chairwoman Vargas said it will be a long term goal to renovate Moser School and she thinks the Staff has accomplished a list of short term goals. If the Senior Center is where they want to go with this then she can direct Town Manager Scaife to look into that maybe to get some information. Rich Laria asked if that wasn't the seniors' original request for almost two years now, which was based on information from the Senior Task Force, to ask the Town Council to find a suitable location for a new Senior Center. Councilor Kochanek said that isn't an easy thing to do because space isn't around. The first message they got was that the seniors want more space but then they were told that they want to stay here at the Community Center. It is almost impossible for them to stay here and be given more space. Rich Laria read aloud from a statement made on June 27, 2013 that stated "We respectfully petition the Town Council to start actively seeking a permanent site for new Senior/Community Center". They are still asking for this long term. Councilor Kochanek said among themselves that they have talked about what places might be available and there aren't any unless they want to pay some serious dollars. Rich Laria said the seniors understand that for long term, they can't do this without financial help and they will probably need something through the State. He spoke to Mayor Vassel who had several calls into State Representative Guerrero and there was a letter from April 2014 with regards to asking him to give them some support. Rich Laria asked Councilor Szeps, who is the liaison for the Town Council for State Representative Guerrero, if he was able to contact him. Councilor Szeps said he has but not on this topic. Rich Laria said if they can move forward with this topic fast that it would be appreciated because he thinks this is the most important one. They know State funding is needed to get this. Councilor Kochanek said if the Town can spend \$500,000 for turf for a field then it can certainly spend money on the seniors. Rich Laria told Councilor Szeps that he would be happy to meet with him and State Representative Guerrero at any time.

Chairwoman Vargas thinks that maybe they have been “spinning” their wheels from when they had met upstairs in a small room for the first time until now but she has a better appreciation for the seniors. After listening to the seniors over the past year and after discussions, she knows there is more now than just Wii Bowling and she said she needs to know this if they want her to discuss this with other Councilors and be their advocate. She thinks that she personally has a better understanding and appreciation. She thinks they and the Staff are moving in the right direction and hopefully they will be getting the word out to more seniors. This hasn’t been a waste of time and she appreciates everyone’s patience.

Bernadette Pietraroia said she had spoken to State Representative Guerrera and Mayor Vasel when there was a luncheon about how one of the Senior Centers had built a new Community Center and senior housing was put above it, which is a plus as far as getting funding. Bernadette Pietraroia said it might be another option if they decide that they could look into a total Community Center for all of the ages. She said State Representative Guerrera and Mayor Vasel were both interested in that but she never followed up because she thought the Committee would have addressed this by now. Bernadette Pietraroia understands the confusion about the seniors giving different messages but ideally they would like a Community Center. They would be happy to move along though if not because they can’t do that in the present facility. She said it was mentioned that they don’t want to have the present facility empty and she didn’t know if they could lease offices to other businesses, etc. She then referred to senior housing not just for low income people but also for the middle income people and if that would make it easier to fund a Community Center, as well as if it would be less costly. Councilor Kochanek asked what Town did that. Bernadette Pietraroia said she had that paperwork at home or she might have given it to Lisa Zerio. Chairwoman Vargas asked Bernadette Pietraroia to give this to Lisa Zerio and then she can let this Committee know.

Councilor Szeps said he has been listening to a lot of information about the needs and wants of the seniors. It gets frustrating when they try to do something but he thinks it is a positive thing that they could come up with some of the items they listed this evening. The important thing they heard this evening was that they almost bypassed the Staff. There is a Park Master Plan in the Parks and Recreation Department but he guesses there is no Senior Master Plan. He said for them to give the Staff, including Town Manager Scaife, a chance to work with the seniors, who they work with on daily basis, to put a Master Plan together. Councilor Szeps thinks they could leverage their politicians if they have a plan in hand. They should use the plan as their tool for going forward so they can put all of the guessing to the side. They can go to this document as the funding becomes available and as the population increases to say this is what they would like to do. He would be very supportive of this and he instructed Town Manager Scaife to work with the seniors and Staff to build the Master Plan. Councilor Szeps said asking for a Senior Center was happening long before 2013. They can’t come for something this large and discuss their wants and needs at an hour long meeting. He said for them to develop a plan that everyone can agree on.

Toni Palazzolo, George Road, R.H., said one of her personal frustrations is about the bus (in the Human Services Department) that Melissa Hicks (Director of Human Services) has and why it is called “Elderly and Disabled” because that is such a discriminatory name. Toni Palazzolo said Melissa Hicks keeps telling her that is what it has to be called. Toni Palazzolo thinks the sign on

the front of Newington's new Senior Center is in that same vein. She doesn't want to go to a Senior Center that has that name. They told them they are talking about whether they want a Community Center or Senior Center, etc. They need to have someone look at grants to find out where the money will be coming from and what they will have to call this, etc. She knows that people are saying they would like a Community Center but the seniors won't be using this at 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m.

Town Manager Scaife thinks the concept of the Master Plan is a really good idea so they will run with that and it shouldn't take them long. This evening's discussion has also been helpful as well. Moser School is one of the options that they can start looking at and they will actively begin working on that. He referred to a point that had been made about Staffing at the beginning of this meeting and he believes that they need to expand it. He believes it was mentioned that they have the equivalent now of two full time people and he said this certainly will be addressed but there are more than two full time people (i.e. there is a cook and a nurse, etc.). Fifty-four percent of the space in the present facility is used by seniors so about half of the custodial service is there for the seniors. He then mentioned Lisa Zerio's efforts and her Administrative Staff's efforts.

Chairwoman Vargas asked Town Manager Scaife if he will have something for this May or if he wants to wait and he said this will probably be this June. Chairwoman Vargas said Town Manager Scaife will be working with the Staff to come up with the plan for the seniors and they will be looking to get information about the Moser School site too.

3. APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY MEETING MINUTES

Councilor Szeps made a motion to approve the Minutes of the February 17, 2015 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

4. NEW BUSINESS

No new business was discussed.

5. OTHER; DISCUSSION

There was no other discussion.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary

